

REMARKS

This application has been carefully reviewed in light of the Office Action dated July 28, 2004. Claims 1, 2, 4 to 16 and 25 to 43 are pending in the application, of which Claims 1, 7, 12, 25, 27 to 30, 32 to 34 and 41 to 43 are independent. Reconsideration and further examination are respectfully requested.

Initially, Applicants thank the Examiner for the issuance of a new Office Action, to which this Amendment is responsive, and for restarting the response date thereto.

Claims 1 to 24 were rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 101 102(b) over U.S. Patent No. 5,381,242 (Fujii). Reconsideration and withdrawal of this rejection are respectfully requested.

The present invention concerns managing maintenance agreements for an image forming apparatus. In operation, the number of printed paper sheets is tracked for the image forming apparatus as well as a number of types of service agreement. The amount paid by an operator for use of the image forming apparatus is calculated on the basis of the number of pages printed, type of maintenance agreement selected by the operator and the content of the services provided by service personnel.

Turning to specific claim language, amended independent Claim 1 is directed to an information processing system for managing plural types of maintenance agreements relating to an image forming apparatus. The system includes an acquisition section for acquiring a number of printed paper sheets from an image forming apparatus via a communication path, a memory for storing a variety of charge amounts per paper sheet output by the image forming apparatus in accordance with the types of maintenance

agreements of a content of services by a serviceman of the image forming apparatus, and a calculation section for calculating a payable amount on the basis of (i) the number of printed paper sheets acquired by the acquisition section and (ii) a charge amount of the variety of charge amounts stored in the memory for the image forming apparatus from which the number of printed paper sheets is acquired.

One feature of the invention according to amended independent Claim 1 is that the apparatus has a memory for storing a variety of charge amounts per paper sheet output by the image forming apparatus in accordance with different types of maintenance agreements. In addition, a payable amount can be calculated on the basis of (i) the number of printed paper sheets and (ii) a charge amount from among the charge amounts stored in said memory for the image forming apparatus. According to this arrangement, a maintenance fee for the image forming apparatus, such as a printer or a copier, can be charged in conjunction with a counter value indicating a number of printed sheets. The service provider providing maintenance service can thus obtain a payment for a maintenance agreement by charging, for a counterpart of the agreement, an amount corresponding the sheet counter value of the image forming apparatus.

In contrast, Fujii discloses a facsimile apparatus and a maintenance charge control apparatus capable of controlling a maintenance charge. The maintenance charge control apparatus calculates the maintenance charge in response to the count received from the facsimile apparatus, and generates and transmits image data of a bill for the calculated charge. The bill image is issued by the facsimile apparatus. A receipt of the maintenance charge is issued from the facsimile apparatus in a similar way as the bill. The facsimile apparatus manages the paid count of sheets. Fujii discloses a control information and

maintenance charge information regarding plural facsimiles managed by the maintenance charge control apparatus, stored in RAM 36b.

Moreover, Fujii discloses an equation for a billing amount Y in column 12, line 61. The equation is:

$$Y=B+k(N-n_0)$$

wherein:

B is a base charge;

k is a unit price per sheet;

N is the count of the sheet counter; and

n₀ is the number of previously paid for sheets.

As can be seen from the equation, k is fixed. Therefore, Fuji fails to disclose a relationship between the unit price k and the content of a maintenance service agreement. The maintenance charge control apparatus of Fuji uses the value k for calculating maintenance charge independently of any actual services provided to a facsimile user. This is because an object of the invention in Fujii is controlling a maintenance charge for a facsimile machine using a public telephone line. As such, there is no need to associate the unit price k and the content of a maintenance service agreement.

In contrast to Fuji, the present invention stores a variety of charge amounts per paper sheet output by the image forming apparatus. The charge amounts are in accordance with the types of maintenance agreements of a content of services provided by a serviceman for the image forming apparatus. As Fujii fails to disclose storing a variety of charge amounts per paper sheet in accordance with types of maintenance agreements, the maintenance charge control apparatus in Fujii cannot calculate a maintenance charge

corresponding to various maintenance services provided by the service provider.

Accordingly, the present invention provides a charging process that is more efficient because an apparatus in accordance with the present invention calculates a maintenance charge amount including a service charge based upon the number of printed sheets and the content of services that were actually provided by a service personnel.

Accordingly, amended independent Claim 1 is believed to be in condition for allowance. In addition, amended independent Claims 7 and 12 are directed to method and storage medium embodiments of amended independent Claim 1, and are also believed to be in condition for allowance for the same reasons as amended independent Claim 1.

New independent Claims 41, 42 and 43 are directed to apparatus, method, and storage medium claims in accordance with amended independent Claim 1.

Accordingly, Claims 41, 42 and 43 are believed to be in condition for allowance for at least the same reasons as amended independent Claim 1.

The remaining claims in this application are each dependent from the independent claims discussed above and are therefore believed patentable for the same reasons. Because each dependent claim is also deemed to define an additional aspect of the invention, however, the individual consideration of each dependent claim on its own merits is respectfully requested.

In view of the foregoing amendments and remarks, and no other matters being raised in the Office Action, the entire application is believed to be in condition for allowance, and such action is respectfully requested at the Examiner's earliest convenience.

Applicants' undersigned attorney may be reached in our Costa Mesa, CA office at (714) 540-8700. All correspondence should continue to be directed to our below-listed address.

Respectfully submitted,



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